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Commission on the Status of Women

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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in the critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality

Statement submitted by Associated Country Women of the World, Christian Children's Fund, International Council of Jewish Women, International Federation of University Women, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, United States of America, League of Women Voters of the United States, Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers of St. Dominic, Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic and School Sisters of Notre Dame, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and International Union for Health Education and World Organization for Early Childhood Education, non-governmental organizations on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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* E/CN.6/2004/1.

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The Working Group on Girls of the NGO Committee on UNICEF advocates for girls' rights by taking a life cycle approach to gender issues. The NGOs signing this statement believe that this approach is of great importance in considering the two areas of concern being addressed at this 48th Session of the CSW.

It is critical to remember that girls are the women of tomorrow and that action must be taken to ensure their rights as children and later as women. Guarantees of girls' rights are included in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

During this session of the Commission on the Status of Women the role of men and boys in gender equality will be explored. This must not be seen as a means of diminishing men and boys but rather as a means by which all people, men and boys, women and girls can expand their well-being.

Two primary approaches to furthering this goal are of special importance to girls. The first is the role of the father and the second is the critical need for early childhood education that will give both girls and boys a respect for the needs, rights and strengths of others regardless of gender.

In societies where the power within families lies with men, fathers must be encouraged to ensure their girls of equal protections and rights. A major step to be taken is to provide girls with equal access to education. Girls must also be assured of equal treatment with their brothers in terms of birth registration, nutrition, health care and respect as well. The alarming growth in the HIV/AIDS pandemic seen in many parts of the world results in large part from the vulnerability of girls who have not been given these protections. In some parts of the world where the rate of HIV/AIDS infection is growing most rapidly, girls are becoming infected at a rate many times that of boys.

Additionally the exploitation of girls' labor, which both prevents them from achieving an adequate education and grows out of their lack of adequate marketable skills, is a serious abrogation of girls rights.

It has been shown that if girls are to receive the rights guaranteed to all children, these rights must be protected within the family and the community as well as by statute. Statutory protections must be bolstered by a willingness of all segments of society to uphold the law. A most effective way of enlisting men and boys in building gender equality is to begin in childhood by building respect for all at the earliest stages of socialization. Early childhood education programs must be developed which underline this mutual respect while acknowledging the culture and traditions of the society.